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SUBJECT: TWO AFRICAN DIPLOMATS IN BEIJING SHARE VIEWS ON
CHINA-AFRICA RELATIONS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.
4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: China's growing engagement with Africa is a mixed blessing for African nations, according to two Beijing-based Rwandan and Nigerian diplomats. While acknowledging the positive role that China plays in Africa, the two diplomats lamented the imbalance in power between China and smaller, poorer African countries. China recently presented Rwanda with a state-of-the-art Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) building and has plans to expand its cultural and health programs in Rwanda. In Nigeria, China is trying to make amends for two recent setbacks in bilateral relations, the cancellation of a lucrative railway contract and failure of a Chinese-made communications satellite. End Summary.

¶2. (C) PolOff discussed China-Africa relations with Rwandan EmbOff Emile Rwagasana February 2 and with Nigerian EmbOff Tony Alonwu February 3.

Win-Win Cooperation?

¶3. (SBU) During Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi's January 13-17 trip to Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa and Malawi (with later stops in Brazil and Portugal), Xinhua News Agency cited FM Yang as saying that "China will continue to promote China-Africa solidarity and cooperation on the basis of sincere friendship, equal treatment, mutual benefit and common development." In describing President Hu Jintao's upcoming February 10-17 trip to Mali, Senegal, Tanzania and Mauritius, MFA Spokesperson Jiang Yu emphasized "common development" and "friendly relations of cooperation." Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Africa Studies Director He Wenping echoed these themes in a recent meeting with PolOff, stating that equality and mutual benefit were the most important principles of Chinese aid to Africa.

¶4. (C) In contrast to China's rosy official view of relations with Africa, two African diplomats privately expressed concerns to us recently about the imbalance in relations. Rwandan diplomat Rwagasana stated that China-Africa relations were driven by China's need for resources to fuel its economic growth. He lamented the disparity in power between China and small African countries such as Rwanda, arguing that, in terms of minerals and resources, China wanted to "conquer" the continent. Although he acknowledged that Rwanda benefited from China's aid and investment, Rwagasana said his country's weakness allowed China to set the terms of cooperation. Referring to China's foreign policy mantra of "win-win cooperation," he said, "how can we win when the buyer sets the price?" He argued that some African countries found it hard to refuse investment from China because other countries were reluctant to invest in Africa. "There's a feeling among Africans that if China will not invest, no one

will, and African resources will be wasted," Rwagasana said.

¶15. (C) Rwagasana's views were echoed by Nigerian diplomat Tony Alonwu, who said China was the big winner in its engagement with most African nations. Alonwu argued that Nigeria's large size and abundance of resources made its relationship with China relatively balanced. However, for smaller, poorer African countries)- particularly those in Francophone Africa)- "there is no equality or balance" in their relations with China. Desperate for aid and investment, these countries were "coerced" by China into accepting aid-for-resources deals that benefited China much more than the aid recipient, Alonwu said.

Can't Complain About a Free MFA Building

¶16. (C) During his January 14-15 visit to Rwanda, FM Yang officially handed over to the Rwanda MFA a USD8.5-million, state-of-the-art office building constructed by the Chinese. According to Rwagasana, Rwanda encouraged the Chinese construction company to hire Rwandan workers, and although the company hired a small number of Rwandans to lay cement, the vast majority of workers, including all the engineers, were brought from China. "We could not complain because they gave us a free building for our MFA," Rwagasana said. He commented that China's construction of government buildings in many African countries provided a constant reminder to African officials of China's support for African governments.

China's Use of Soft Power to "Penetrate" Rwanda

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¶17. (C) Rwagasana said China was successfully using tools of soft power to spread its influence in Rwanda. He noted that China would open a Confucius Institute (a Chinese government-funded institution to promote Chinese language and culture) at the Kigali Institute of Education and bring Chinese-language professors to teach at the Institute in September 2009. Rwagasana expected the Confucius Institute and Chinese language classes to be popular among students, who see more and more job opportunities at Chinese firms. In his view, China's active promotion of its language and culture was an effective way to market itself and improve its image. According to Rwagasana, China was also successfully "penetrating" Africa through its investment in health projects. When asked about China's plan to establish a malaria prevention and treatment center in Rwanda, Rwagasana commented that China had an ulterior motive in establishing the center: to open markets for Chinese-made drugs. These drugs would give Rwandans tangible evidence of China's positive engagement with Rwanda, he added.

Nigeria: China Seeks to Mend Bilateral Relations

¶18. (C) Alonwu said the Nigerian Minister of Transport recently met with representatives of the China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC) to renegotiate the contract to construct the Kano-Lagos railway. The original contract for USD8.3 billion was signed in 2006, but the Nigerian government halted the project in November 2008 because of concerns about the high cost of the contract and CRCC's capacity to handle the work. Alonwu said that China had tried to "take Nigeria for a ride" and that Nigeria hoped to renegotiate the contract for around USD5 billion. Turning to another recent setback in bilateral relations, Alonwu said that, though the March 2007 launch of the Chinese-made communications satellite Nigcomsat-1 made Nigeria the first African nation in space, Nigeria had been greatly disappointed by failure of the satellite in November 2008 after only 18 months in orbit. However, he noted that China would replace the satellite at no additional cost to Nigeria, partly to mend bilateral relations and improve its image in

Nigeria.

Comment

19. (C) In spite of China's friendly official ties with African governments, including Nigeria and Rwanda, these two African diplomats clearly expressed a degree of suspicion and resentment toward China's engagement with Africa. While these diplomats acknowledged the importance of China's investment and concessionary loans, they both see China as the disproportionate beneficiary of its "win-win" relationship with Africa. While we are not prepared to say that such negative sentiments about China's relations with Africa apply across the board to African diplomats in Beijing, we do note the disparity between the friendly official ties and the private expressions of resentment.
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